

Rai Crear, **Testimony** on HB 7027, February 23, 2017

Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Rai Crear and I am a registered voter in Bridgeport. I am testifying regarding HB 7027, An Act Concerning the State Budget. I am particularly concerned about the proposed "consolidation" cut to the Regional Mental Health Boards, which would in fact eliminate those entities.

Defunding the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board (SWRMHB), or any of the Regional Mental Health Boards, would only mean taking away a vital piece of the work that needs and continues to be done in order to sustain a healthy behavioral system for clients and providers. The Southwest Regional Mental Health Board has enlightened my life and has helped me become a resource to my community, family, and friends. I have been able to connect to people that I have not been able to do so in the past. The organization is responsible for connecting the community, representing the community perspective and driving the community narrative that has since been translated into significant changes in services and support within the state. The Southwest Regional Mental Health Board is the connector of dots in more ways than none, even providing oversight of the award winning online peer support community, TurningPointCT.org. The website, with the support of the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board, has been able to provide vital information to young adults in recovery from mental illness and substance abuse. It has helped develop a unique, online support network in Connecticut that has encouraged healthy living, transition and most importantly, the courage to share experiences and to not feel alone. I have witnessed many young adults, providers and parents visit the website, gather information and find support.

As the state privatizes more services in the next couple of years because of this proposed budget, I hope that you understand the importance of sustaining the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board. Without the Southwest Regional Mental Health Board, the state eliminates a network of resources, advocacy work, trainings, program evaluations and neglects the overall responsibility of providing quality assistance to those in need. Because of the significant and collaborative work of the Regional Mental Health Boards, policy recommendations have been gathered at the grass root level and are now being discussed at the state level. The Regional Mental Health Boards are necessary and represent the voice of the people.

I want to thank you for allowing me to submit testimony and for your continued support of services to people with mental health and/or substance use disorders. Your empathy, time and commitment to understanding is appreciated.